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New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Clay
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: In recent days, we have witnessed another dangerous escalation of violence in Gaza that risked unleashing an armed conflict with catastrophic consequences for 2 million impoverished Palestinians — people who live under the control of Hamas and have endured three wars and crippling Israeli closures. The Secretary-General warned that a new war in Gaza would bring forth another unbearable tragedy and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint. My team and I worked closely with Egypt and all concerned parties to ensure a return to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements. Thankfully, a precarious restoration of calm has now been achieved. We must all work to ensure that this calm is maintained.

The period of 11 to 13 November saw one of the fiercest exchanges of fire since the 2014 Gaza conflict. The escalation was triggered by an operation Israel Defense Forces (IDF) inside the Gaza Strip in which a local commander of Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades and six other Palestinians were killed. One IDF officer was also killed and a second injured in an incident. In the following two days, militants in Gaza launched some 450 rockets and mortars at Israel, including at the towns of Ashkelon, Sderot and Netivot, killing one Palestinian civilian and seriously wounding one Israeli civilian. An IDF soldier was also seriously wounded by a targeted anti-tank guided-missile strike on a bus transporting military personnel in Kfar Aza. The IDF responded in turn with a series of air strikes on 160 militant targets, including a Hamas-affiliated television station and a hotel, resulting in the killing seven Palestinians — at least four identified by the Israeli army as members of armed groups.

The fragility of the situation underscores the urgent need to fundamentally change the dynamics on the ground that address the underlying political issues. Two million Palestinians in Gaza cannot be held hostage to political grandstanding and brinkmanship. Their lives matter and they deserve real leadership that addresses the real problems of Gaza.

The latest outbreak of violence came just as the United Nations and its partners were intensifying efforts to alleviate Gaza's deepening humanitarian and economic crises and, critically, to provide space for ongoing Egyptian-led efforts to advance intra-Palestinian reconciliation. This is essential to ending the occupation and resolving the wider political conflict.

Significant headway has already been made on the implementation of the package of urgent interventions endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians at its September meeting, held in New York. In October, the United Nations started importing and monitoring the delivery of donor-funded fuel to Gaza's power station. This resulted in the greatest supply of electricity since March 2017 — a minimum of 11 hours per day. I reiterate the United Nations sincere gratitude to the Government of the State of Qatar for the generous funding to this end.

The impact has been immediate. Water supply has increased, the risk of sewage overflow has been reduced, hospitals are less dependent on precarious generators, street lights are on again, children can study and play, and families have more cash in hand to meet their daily needs. These improvements, however, are temporary. They provide much-needed relief, but can do little to reverse the long-standing, structural problems affecting Gaza, driven by years of crippling closures and Hamas control.

The implementation of the other urgent humanitarian interventions in Gaza must also be expedited. My team and I will continue to engage with the Palestinian Government, donors and partners on the ground to support several initiatives. These include finding a sustainable solution to Gaza's electricity and health problems, increasing the supply of potable

water and medical supplies, and sewage treatment. These should take place alongside concerted efforts to rescue the economy through cash-for-work and other emergency measures.

Yet, the international community cannot bear the burden of addressing Gaza's problems alone. The primary responsibility falls on the parties themselves. The clock on intra-Palestinian reconciliation is ticking. I urge all Palestinian parties to not waste time and engage in earnest and achieve visible progress in the coming six months. This is in the interests of the Palestinian people. It is in the interests of peace. The success of international efforts in Gaza depends on the parties' willingness to confront the inevitable hurdles, withstand the internal political consequences and stay committed to the reconciliation process over the long term. If any side fails, every side fails.

Hamas and militant groups must stop all provocations and attacks. Israel must significantly improve the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza as a step towards the lifting of the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The Palestinian Authority must strengthen its engagement in Gaza, which is an integral part of the Palestinian territory.

In earlier incidents, before the most recent escalation on 26 and 27 October, 34 rockets were launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad towards Israel. In response, the IDF targeted 95 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad military sites across the Strip. A hospital in the vicinity of one of the targets was damaged, as were several homes in Gaza City. On 28 October, the IDF struck and killed three Palestinian children aged 13 to 15 in the southern Gaza Strip, who they said were placing improvised explosive devices at the security fence — a claim refuted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. Protests the next day saw some 3,000 participants, with 1 Palestinian killed and another 15 injured by IDF live fire.

I remain very concerned by Israel's persistent use of live fire against protesters. I call on the authorities to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from using lethal force, except as a last resort. I also urge Hamas and other Palestinian militants to end the indiscriminate firing of rockets into southern Israel and to stop all violence near the fence, including attempts to breach it.

Overall in the reporting period, Israeli security forces killed 31 Palestinians in Gaza, including four children. One IDF soldier was killed during the 11 November operation. Meanwhile, in the occupied West Bank, Israeli security forces killed four Palestinians. On 22 October, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in Hebron after he was reported to have stabbed and injured an Israeli soldier. Three other attempts against Israeli civilians or Israeli security forces personnel were reported near the Kiryat Arba and Kfar Adumim settlements on 5 and 6 November, and in Jerusalem on 14 November. On 24 October, a 21-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by the IDF during clashes following an IDF weapons search near Tubas in the northern West Bank. On 26 October, in the context of clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians near Ramallah, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 33-year-old Palestinian and injured nine others; another 28-year-old Palestinian subsequently died of his wounds later in November.

Israeli settlement activity continues to advance, eating away at the viability of a contiguous future Palestinian State. I reiterate that all settlement activities are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace, and must immediately cease. On 5 November, Israeli authorities advanced two plans for a total of 264 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramot. The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures also continue, with a total of 31 structures demolished or seized by the authorities, citing a lack of building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in the Israeli-controlled Area C and East Jerusalem. As a result, some 25 people were displaced and, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the livelihoods of 200 others were affected.

Meanwhile, on 4 November the Israeli authorities informed the High Court of Justice of their decision to demolish an illegal outpost comprising some dozen Israeli families that had been established in recent months in an abandoned military base in the Jordan Valley. I welcome the announcement by the Israeli authorities on 21 October to delay the demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu and reiterate the call of the international community for plans for the demolition of that community and all others facing similar pressures to be annulled.

On 28 and 29 October, the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council held its thirtieth session in Ramallah. In its final statement, the Central Council reaffirmed recent decisions taken to suspend its recognition of the State of Israel until the latter

recognizes the State of Palestine, based on 4 June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to end security coordination in all of its forms and disengage economically from Israel. A follow-up committee chaired by President Mahmoud Abbas was established to discuss the implementation of those decisions.

The situation in Lebanon will be considered by the Council this week. As we speak, the political actors have yet to find an agreement on a national unity Government. The delay hampers Lebanon's ability to address issues essential to its stability, including the economy. We again encourage all stakeholders to put national interests first and expeditiously reach an agreement that preserves Lebanon's stability and ability to deliver on its international commitments.

In closing, let make two important points.

First, on Gaza, it is vital that all stakeholders work to de-escalate the deteriorating situation and seize the current window of opportunity to advance urgent humanitarian and economic interventions, in line with the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. I would also like to reiterate the importance of sustained support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and extend our gratitude to the State of Kuwait for the swift disbursement of its $42 million contribution to the Agency.

Palestinian factions must seize the opportunity to engage in earnest with the Egyptian-led efforts to bring Gaza back under the control of the legitimate Palestinian Government. We in the international community must do all we can to support those efforts. Israel must also recognize that Gaza is about to explode, and in order to prevent such an explosion, people must also see a normalization of their lives, for which the closures need to be relaxed and ultimately lifted.

We cannot stand idle and allow the division between the West Bank and Gaza to be further entrenched. The Palestinian people are demanding that their leadership finally reunite Gaza and the West Bank, advance the goal of peacefully ending the Israeli occupation and establish a viable Palestinian State based on the relevant United Nations resolutions. That is what people desire; that is what they deserve.

Secondly, on the broader peace efforts, it is essential that we prevent the further collapse of the foundations that must underpin any future agreement. We must continue to consistently push back against the entrenchment of the military occupation and the erosion of international consensus on the final status issues. Together, we must work with determination and vigilance to establish an environment conducive to the return of negotiations that will end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with the recommendations of the Middle East Quartet report of 2016 (S/2016/595, annex). The United Nations remains firmly committed to advancing all efforts towards a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, based on the relevant Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. His presentations on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are always detailed and well-considered. But, as we have pointed out, as a survey of the threats to peace and security in the Middle East, Mr. Mladenov's briefings are, by their mandate, very incomplete. While the Council remains focused on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, it ignores other, very serious conflicts in the Middle East.

One such conflict has in recent months come to the doorstep of Europe and the United States — that is the continued evidence of increased international terrorist activity by the Iranian regime. Iranian assassinations of political opponents are as old as the Islamic Republic itself. While United States diplomats were still being held hostage by Islamic revolutionaries in the United States embassy in Tehran, Iranian agents and proxies began a campaign of political murder in Europe, North Africa and across the Middle East.

Iranian malign behaviour does not target one country alone; it targets us all. We have seen that no more profoundly than over the past months, in which multiple European countries have publicly decried Iranian attempts to murder dissidents on their own soil. Since Mr. Mladenov's previous briefing, on 30 October Danish officials revealed a plot by Iranian intelligence agents to murder three exiled Iranian dissidents on Danish soil. The Danish Government arrested an Iranian regime assassin in Norway on 21 October. Danish officials are outraged, and rightly so. The Iranian plot was such a blatant violation of Denmark's

sovereignty that one Danish politician compared the plot to Russia's attempted poisoning of the Skripals on British soil earlier this year.

But Denmark is not the only country that has been targeted by the regime. The Danish allegations came just days after the French Government accused Iranian intelligence of plotting a bomb attack on an Iranian opposition rally in Paris in June. In that plot, a Belgian husband and wife of Iranian origin were arrested, along with a high-ranking Iranian diplomat in Austria. The diplomat provided the directions and explosives for the husband-and-wife team to bomb the Iranian resistance gathering, which included United States citizens. All three were arrested. Of course, all of that follows an Iranian-backed attack on the United States consulate in Basra, following months of the Iranian regime's violations of Iraqi national sovereignty.

Those attempts to murder their political opponents on foreign soil reflect the true nature of the Iranian regime. Those attacks are precisely the sort of behaviour that led the United States to reimpose sanctions against Iran on 5 November. That was the largest sanctions action against Iran ever undertaken by the United States. Our Administration long ago came to the conclusion that much more needed to be done if there was to be any chance to prod the Iranian Government into the community of peaceful, law-abiding nations.

We have seen the tragic legacy of appeasement before. The Council was, in many ways, created as a counter to that failed diplomatic strategy. The Tehran regime has proven itself to be the same violent and predatory group of murderers that it was in the 1980s. Our European allies are increasingly finding proof of that in their own front yards. We must unite in our efforts to stop that behaviour before it reaches more innocent people across the world.

In fairness to Mr. Mladenov, his briefing on this month's events in the Middle East did touch on the current violence in Gaza, but his reporting misses the mark when he calls for restraint from both sides. Yes, Israel launched air strikes on military posts, weapon depots and intelligence assets in Gaza, but it did so in response to the over 400 rockets and mortars that were fired indiscriminately from Gaza into Israel. Neighbourhoods were targeted. A bus was bombed by an anti-tank missile. Families were forced into bomb shelters to escape the barrage.

Even if those present accept the Hamas excuse that it launched its missiles in response to an Israeli covert operation, the fact cannot be escaped that the Gaza militants targeted civilians in response. Their actions were the actions not of a nation exercising self-defence, but of a terrorist group seizing a pretext to kill civilians. Neither can the fact be escaped that the group responsible for the rocket attacks, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, is an Iranian-supported group. Palestinian Islamic Jihad is yet another terrorist proxy that Iran calls on to stoke violence and instability in the region, and those missing facts are crucial. The fact is that there is only one side that attacks indiscriminately; one side that targets civilians; one side that terrorizes to achieve its objectives.

But I will close by agreeing with Mr. Mladenov on one point. Both sides must work to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. Neither side can get everything that it wants. Both sides must compromise, and compromise can begin only with a clear, honest and complete appraisal of the facts on the ground. Without that, this monthly discussion is doomed to fail in its objective of helping to achieve peace.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for the painful briefing he delivered, which echoes what many among us have repeated time and again in this very Chamber — that the situation in the Gaza Strip remains on the brink of another potential destructive conflict.

There is international consensus that we need to strengthen multilateralism and the role of the United Nations, while reaffirming its role in preventing a third world war, especially in the light of the great losses in lives and property during the first two. We renew our commitment to supporting multilateral mechanisms in the face of the pressures to which they have recently been subjected. We support the Secretary-General's statement to the effect that the Security Council has dealt with the Middle East peace process in a way that has helped to diminish people's trust in the international community's ability to provide solutions. That is especially true given the fact that the Charter of the United Nations confers the authority and responsibility to deal with such crises upon the Security Council, which has allowed Israel, the occupying Power, to

continue to violate international law and disregard the Council's resolutions with impunity.

Jointly with Bolivia, last Tuesday we submitted a request for the convening of a meeting under the agenda item "Other business", given the situation on the ground and its dangerous escalation, which equals in intensity the events of the 2014 conflict, when the Israeli special forces pushed three kilometres into the Gaza Strip. That was a blatant violation and evinced a total disregard for the safety of civilians in order to commit a crime in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The incursion led to the deaths of 14 people. Israel did not stop at that point. After it began another cycle of violence on Sunday, Israel launched widespread air strikes for two full days against various areas in the Gaza Strip, which killed unarmed Palestinian civilians and damaged civilian infrastructure.

The Israeli approach is known to all. Israel's ongoing targeting of civilians in the Gaza Strip did not begin on Sunday and will not end on Tuesday, but regrettably it is clearly escalating. Since March, the Israeli occupying forces have continued to use excessive, disproportionate and arbitrary force to target civilian demonstrators with live ammunition. Since the beginning of the Great March of Return, a total of 228 have been martyred, including 41 children, and the number of injured has exceeded 24,000 individuals, many of whom have suffered permanent disabilities. Israel's actions constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In that regard, we reiterate our condemnation of the targeting of innocent civilians by anyone, anywhere and at any time. We hold Israel, the occupying Power, fully responsible for the acts of violence it has committed and the escalation it has caused. We call on the Security Council to implement its relevant resolutions on the protection of Palestinian civilians, especially resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), on the need to implement the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel would not have continued to act that way — similar to what we witnessed over the past few days, with its provocative acts against the Palestinian people — if the Security Council had stood firm and united against such acts.

Once again, we reaffirm the importance of the Council's playing a complementary role to the United Nations efforts led by Mr. Mladenov. We highly value his role and that of Egypt in putting an end to those aggressive acts. We hope that those efforts will bear fruit and lead to a sustainable ceasefire and the protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip.

It is unfortunate that not only does the dangerous security situation facing civilians in the Gaza Strip threaten their safety and security, but also that the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, now entering its eleventh year, has led to the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic, security and political situations there. As expressed clearly in the warnings issued by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the situation in Gaza will lead to an explosion. Half of the population in the Gaza Strip is living below the line of poverty. That is why he calls on the international community to take decisive action to address that deteriorating situation. Israel is legally and materially responsible for the crimes that it is perpetrating. We call on Israel to lift the unjust blockade against the Gaza Strip, which has led to this unprecedented and dangerous deterioration in the humanitarian situation and living conditions of Palestinian civilians. We call on the international community and international organizations to bring pressure to bear on Israel to lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip and open the crossings under its control.

Israel unfortunately continues its violations against religious sites in East Jerusalem. Every day, it organizes two rounds in which heavily armed Israeli soldiers protect Jewish settlers who break into the Al-Aqsa Mosque yards and hold religious rites. Moreover, on 25 October Israeli forces assaulted and arrested Coptic priests at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in East Jerusalem. We renew our rejection and condemnation of all Israel's violations concerning the holy sites, especially its attempts to change the historic and legal status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to divide it spatially and temporally, as well as to undermine the freedom of the religious rights of Muslims there.

On Wednesday, the State of Kuwait gave its donation of $42 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), represented by Mr. Peter Mulrean in New York. The State of Kuwait has provided UNRWA with a total of $50 million in assistance this year in order to enable it to provide basic services in its areas of operations with a view to alleviating the humanitarian and economic suffering of the Palestinian people. That

will help guarantee the dignity of about 5.3 million Palestinian refugees and assist over 500,000 Palestinian refugee students.

In conclusion, we emphasize our principled and steadfast position on achieving a comprehensive and just solution of the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by all Arab States at the Beirut summit in 2002. That solution would be based on the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967 and on the resolution of all final-status issues.

The leadership, the Government and the people of the State of Kuwait fully support the Palestinian people. We pay tribute to their steadfastness and support their legitimate struggle against the Israeli occupation to acquire all their legitimate political rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their land with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Allow me first to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing and for his tireless efforts and those of his team, working sometimes under very difficult circumstances.

Today, I will address three points: first, the situation in Gaza; secondly, the developments in the West Bank; and thirdly, the way forward.

First, on Gaza, we are deeply concerned by the flare-up of violence that we witnessed at the beginning of last week. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations, Egypt and others that led to an agreement to restore calm. It is now up to the parties to maintain that restoration of relative calm. All parties must exercise maximum restraint. They must refrain from any action that could provoke an escalation, that would put civilian lives at risk and that would jeopardize recent efforts towards reducing tensions and a long-term truce. We reiterate that all parties must comply with their obligations under international law. We condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets. We reiterate that Israel must ensure that all its responses are proportionate and necessary at all times, in line with its obligations under international law.

It has been said many times that the recent escalation cannot be seen in isolation and only reminds us that a sustainable solution for Gaza is needed, as Mr. Mladenov has also just said. The humanitarian and economic situation must be improved. In that regard, the opening of crossings and easing of restrictions on the movement of goods and persons in and out of Gaza are also needed, while taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. We continue to express our full support for the efforts of the United Nations and Nickolay Mladenov to improve the situation in Gaza. We welcome the recent improvement in the electricity supply.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to doing its part. Let me give three examples: first, an additional contribution of €6 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for this year; secondly, our continued investment in the Gas for Gaza project; and thirdly, through our trilateral meetings on water, energy and crossings. A sustainable solution also includes the need for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which should result in the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.

My second point is on the developments in the West Bank. Rising tensions and an increase in violent incidents in the West Bank, leading to the loss of life on both sides, are highly concerning. The suspension of the demolition of the community of Khan Al-Ahmar is a positive development. However, the demolition plan must be withdrawn definitively for it to no longer pose a threat to a two-State-solution. Also in that regard, we are very concerned about the announcement of new settlements in East Jerusalem and Hebron. We reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and are a violation of resolution 2334 (2016).

That brings me to my third point, on the way forward. The current situation is a painful reminder of the lack of progress on the peace process. Yet the goal on which we all agree is bringing an end to the conflict. Positive steps are now needed for the parties to return to the negotiation table and to restart a genuine peace process leading to a two-State solution, based on the well-known parameters. That is the only way to a sustainable solution, fulfilling the aspirations of both sides.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and his commitment day in and day out, and to reiterate France's support for him.

Every day that passes reaffirms something that we regularly condemn before the Council: the false

status quo that we are witnessing and which in fact masks a daily deterioration of the situation, which may at any time degenerate into an open crisis, as we have once again seen in recent days in Gaza. Today, I will specifically focus on Gaza, which is once again on the brink, by highlighting three main elements.

First, between 11 and 13 November, the Gaza Strip was on the point of toppling into a new deadly conflict, such as the territory has experienced three times over the past decade. Given the potential consequences of a new conflict for the populations concerned, we join the Secretary-General in calling for calm and restraint on all sides. In a particularly tense context, we also stress the need to avoid any initiative and action likely to provoke an escalation.

Between 12 and 13 November, nearly 500 rockets were launched towards Israeli territory in less than 24 hours. The fact that there were several victims is to be condemned. The intensity of those strikes is unprecedented, even during the conflict of 2014. We have condemned in the strongest terms such firing of rockets by Hamas and other armed groups at Israeli territory.

The return to calm that we have now seen for almost a week needs to be perpetuated based on the 2014 security arrangements in order to prevent a new cycle of violence, of which the civilian populations would again be the primary victims. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Egypt and the United Nations Special Coordinator. The restraint seen since 13 November should be noted. It must be preserved regardless of the political cost for each side.

Secondly, the most recent peak in tensions, the third since the summer and the most serious, is part of a context of humanitarian collapse and political stalemate in the Gaza Strip. For more than six months, there has been a succession of violent incidents in Gaza against the backdrop of a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented severity. The number of protests that have taken place and that continue along the separation fence is terrible: 170 Palestinians killed and nearly 6,000 shot since 30 March in the context of rallies fuelled by the desperation of the population. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and called on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully, as well as its obligation to protect civilians under international humanitarian law. We have also condemned the manipulation of the protests by Hamas and other armed groups.

To give immediate hope to the people of Gaza, we must first address the humanitarian emergency. The efforts of the Special Coordinator and all United Nations agencies to rapidly improve the humanitarian situation contribute significantly to such a response. All actors must coordinate their efforts to that end. Ultimately, only lifting the blockade, accompanied by the necessary security guarantees for Israel, will make it possible to meet the needs of the population.

Lastly, there can be no lasting solution to the crisis in Gaza without a reconciliation agreement, which must enable the Palestinian Authority to regain all its prerogatives in the territory. We support that goal in the framework of the efforts of Egypt and the Special Coordinator. We call on all parties to resume the dialogue to relaunch the process of inter-Palestinian reconciliation, as an extension of the agreement reached in Cairo a year ago.

Let us also remember that Gaza is not a stand-alone territory and cannot be dissociated from the Palestinian question as a whole. There will be no lasting peace in the region without agreement between Israel and Palestine, no viable Israeli-Palestinian agreement without a Palestinian State, and no Palestinian State without an agreement that allows for unity between Gaza and the West Bank under the aegis of the legitimate Palestinian authorities.

Given the situation in Gaza since last March, the Security Council has never been able to speak with one voice. That deafening silence more incomprehensible by the day to the populations of the region, as it is to the world watching us.

I would like to expand on my remarks regarding the Palestinian question as a whole. Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords and 30 years after the Algiers Declaration, we are close to the point of no return. The promise of two States threatens to fade away before our eyes, like a desert mirage. That promise is deteriorating on the ground, as a result of settlements and the political and territorial fragmentation of Palestinians. But it is also vanishing from our minds, in the absence of a political horizon. Generation after generation, despair and fatalism are overcoming Palestinians and Israelis, who live in two parallel worlds and do not talk to one another. Accordingly, the dynamics can only be negative.

Therefore this point must be hammered home: there is no viable or realistic alternative to the two-State solution. The unique territorial reality, which is taking shape before our eyes, would ultimately mean that the Palestinians give up their national aspirations and that the Israelis relinquish their democratic project. It is therefore essential to fill the current political vacuum. But I would like to remind our American friends, as the President of the Republic has said to President Trump on several occasions, that a peace plan that fails to recognize the internationally agreed parameters, particularly with regard to Jerusalem, would be condemned to failure. Those parameters are not options or a menu from which we can choose. They are the indispensable foundation of any peace plan and any future negotiations. Throwing off those parameters, in particular where it concerns Jerusalem, is to take the risk of transforming a conflict of a territorial and political nature into an identity and religious conflict, which would make any compromise impossible and open a space into which all radical groups in the region would seek to rush.

Allow me to revisit those parameters. They provide for two States living in peace and security, along safe and recognized borders, drawn on the basis of the 1967 lines, with possible territory swaps as agreed by the parties. In that respect, the decision announced last month to suspend the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar is a first step, but one that remains tentative and revocable at all times. We therefore ask the Israeli authorities to renounce it definitively. Khan Al-Ahmar is in an area that is essential to the viability of the two-State solution.

Jerusalem would be the future capital of the two States. Nearly 600 housing units in settlements in East Jerusalem — Ramat Shlomo and Ramot — were approved earlier this month. Those advances further weaken the project of a viable, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. With nearly 5,800 approvals, the year 2018 is close to reaching the record of 2012 in terms of settlements in East Jerusalem.

There must be a fair and realistic solution for Palestinian refugees. In the wait for a negotiated solution, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays a key role, which is crucial to preserve. The goal must be to sustain the exemplary mobilization of the international community following the United States decision to suspend its contribution to the Agency.

France is a friend to both Israelis and Palestinians. It has no other interest than peace in the region and the possibility for the populations concerned to live in safety and dignity. The events that occurred a week ago must be a warning: in Gaza as elsewhere, the same causes always produce the same effects. If we do not deal with those causes, we will not succeed indefinitely in avoiding a new conflict. We therefore have a collective responsibility within the Council to act before it is too late. France will continue to spare no effort in that regard.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): This is the second-to-last meeting concerning the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, that my delegation will be attending, and I have only to express the profound feeling of frustration at the almost total lack of movement towards a solution to the illegal Israeli occupation to which the Palestinian people are subject.

Although the Security Council has adopted more than 80 resolutions — 86 to be exact — that should each constitute the unequivocal certainty that the State of Israel and its allies are fully committed to peace and security in the world, we are now witnesses to the exact opposite. Let us take as an immediate reference resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

An example of the expansionist policies of Israel are the demolitions in what is called Area C, or the recent threat of demolition of the buildings in the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, located in the heart of the West Bank, where approximately 250 Palestinians live. If that demolition is not permanently suspended, it will swell the lists of Palestinians men and women who are displaced from their homes. We again call on the international community, including the Security Council, not to recognize any alteration or modification to the borders established in 1967.

We have also seen in the past few weeks how Israel has increased its violent military actions against the Palestinian civilian population. Last week Israeli bombings killed seven Palestinians amid a brutal military action that, due to the disproportionate use of force and violence against the population of the Gaza strip, has been compared to the 2014 attacks. In that regard, my delegation categorically rejects the firing

of rockets into areas inhabited by civilians in Israeli territories. We deem it inadmissible that heavy artillery and lethal warfare machinery in general should be used to target places inhabited by civilians who are not part of the conflict.

During armed conflicts, it is the women and children who are most affected, even more so if they do not have the only intangible tool that can help them get out of the situations of violence that oppress them: education. It is for that reason that Bolivia has decided to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, an instrument of a political nature that echoes our principled position and reflects our commitment and advocacy when it comes to the human right to education, on which our future and the future of children depend, particularly those who are victims of war.

In that order of priorities, we express our optimism at the announcement of the ceasefire made by the Government of Israel and Hamas militants on the side of the Gaza Strip. We hope that the praiseworthy mediation efforts that the Government of Egypt is carrying out together with the Special Coordinator will lead to the pacification of the area so that negotiations can recommence with a view to resolving tensions definitively. We cannot allow the military apparatus of the Israeli Defence Forces to continue killing innocent Palestinians, and we demand compliance with the ceasefire between the parties in the terms agreed upon in 2014.

On this occasion we again bring to the attention of the Security Council the painful humanitarian situation in Gaza. That situation has worsened as a result of the latest attacks against the Palestinian population, which has already been living under a dire Israeli blockade for almost 12 years. In that context, we express our deep concern for the nearly 20,000 people injured in Gaza during the Great March of Return, which began in March, who have still not received proper attention due to the lack of medicines or basic surgical equipment in the city's hospitals and emergency centres.

The Israeli Government must lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which for more than 11 years has been living under a regime of collective punishment that denies Palestinians access to water and sanitation, restricts their human rights to health care and their access to decent work and the freedom of movement. That Government is responsible for a long list of violations, which all of us in this Chamber have been witnessing month after month and year after year.

As it has done on other occasions, Bolivia demands that Israel, the occupying Power, refrain from such actions and fully comply with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949.

We renew our firm commitment to all international efforts seeking a peaceful solution conducive to ending the situation of the Palestinian occupation. In that regard, we endorse initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others that aim to ensure a just and lasting peace so that both peoples can live within recognized and secure borders.

We reaffirm our conviction that the only long-term solution to the occupation suffered by the Palestinian people is the two-State solution, which at last provides for the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 international borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very comprehensive and insightful briefing.

Unfortunately, despite our constant calls for de-escalation in the Middle East, there has not been any progress at all. On the contrary, last week's escalation of violence in and around Gaza resulted in casualties and many wounded. After weeks of a relatively calm period, we are facing a very alarming situation — one of the most violent escalations since the last war in Gaza, in 2014. Nearly 470 rockets were fired into Israeli territory by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad's affiliated factions. At the same time, Israel conducted approximately 70 retaliatory air strikes within the Gaza Strip.

Poland condemns in the strongest terms the rocket attacks carried out by Hamas and other militant groups from the Gaza Strip targeting civilian communities in southern Israel. There is no justification under any circumstance for indiscriminate and deliberate acts of violence against the civilian population. They are unacceptable. They must stop and never be repeated.

At the same time, Israel's response should respect the principle of proportionality and be carried out within

the framework and limits of international humanitarian law. We strongly urge the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any actions that may lead to further escalation. I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank the United Nations and Special Coordinator Mladenov, as well as the Egyptian authorities, for their unprecedented efforts to put an end to the recent hostilities.

Both Israelis and Palestinians have a right to live in peace and safety. Poland supports a two-State solution, which would incorporate the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence as well as the Israeli right to ensure its security and to normalized relations with Arab States.

On the political track, we have to acknowledge that currently the process is almost entirely blocked. That clearly influences the situation in Gaza, which is not taking place in a vacuum. We stress that the humanitarian situation of 2 million people in the Gaza Strip grows more desperate with each passing day. Limited access to basic services, including health care, and chronic energy and water sanitation crises are their daily reality on the ground. All of that could easily lead once again to an escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further.

We must sustainably address the root causes and improve the situation of the people in Gaza. In order to do so, we must see progress in efforts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. That is why we underline our strong support for the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Advancing urgent infrastructure projects — as proposed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians — aiming to improve water, electricity and health system, and creating employment could have a quick impact on the ground. In our opinion, infrastructure remains a key element of sustainable de-escalation. The importance of practical steps is crucial, as we strongly believe that, in the absence of hope and real prospects, the inhabitants of Gaza, especially the younger generation, might resort to inflammatory rhetoric.

On the subject of youth, let me briefly touch upon the situation of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Although the Agency recovered from major financial deficit this year, it will face the same problem in 2019. In the absence of a lasting political solution, the international community must do its utmost to ensure the continuation of the Agency's work on a sound financial basis.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation thanks Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and objective briefing, as always, and his unfailing commitment to the region.

First of all, we welcome the decision taken by Israel and Hamas in Gaza to observe a ceasefire based on the terms of the agreement the two sides reached in 2014. We appreciate the political will of both sides, which has resulted in the finalization of the truce. We hope that it will lead to a full-fledged peace treaty between the two sides and thereby prevent a relapse, which should be averted at all costs.

We sincerely welcome the efforts of Egypt and the United Nations since the beginning of the crisis to pull Israel and Gaza back from the brink of war and bring about some calm. Astana also appreciates the measures of the international community and different entities to secure a ceasefire. Confidence-building measures and political-diplomatic measures are at the core of our foreign policy and we always urge our partners to utilize them.

Astana encourages both sides and Member States with influence to help work towards a solution by encouraging Israel and Palestine to return to the negotiating table. Such efforts should seek to reach mutually acceptable principles for the coexistence of two States based on international law and Security Council resolutions, as well as address the blockade of the Gaza Strip, where an acute food shortage persists.

However, we are glad to learn that the fuel shipments, under the Organization's supervision, continued to flow into the Strip unhindered. It is equally essential that both parties uphold the ceasefire, exercise maximum restraint and not indulge in any hostile or provocative actions, and do so by liaising with the United Nations, Egypt and other countries of influence.

In order to do so, it is important to consolidate the Palestinian ranks together on a common Palestine Liberation Organization political platform as a necessary condition to realizing the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own independent State. That means paying attention to reaching intra-Palestinian

consolidation to create constructive mechanisms to resolve other problematic issues, such as unemployment and the difficult humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Kazakhstan would like to underscore the responsibility of both sides to prevent an escalation of the conflict and to resume negotiations without any preconditions. My country's position remains unchanged and is very clear. It is based on the principle of two States for two peoples, with the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the international borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. At the same time, we fully understand the aspirations of Israel to live in security. The fundamental concept, as we have always said in the Council, is rooted in the inalienable rights of Palestinians to statehood and the right of Israel to security and recognition.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you for convening this meeting, Mr. President, and we are grateful to Mr. Mladenov for his valuable briefing.

Peru notes with deep concern that the destructive cycle between Israelis and Palestinians does not stop. Escalations of violence, such as the one occurring a week ago, are followed by periods of tense calm, which is simply an unsustainable and destabilizing scenario for the Middle East and for the international community. We continue to mourn new deaths, many of them children and young people, as well as the deteriorating security conditions for millions of Palestinians and Israelis.

We note with concern the serious impact of this vicious cycle on the prospects of resuming a political process leading to the two-State solution. The parties persist in blaming each other and in justifying their violent actions, thereby increasing mistrust and giving free reign to hate and extremist speech. We reiterate our condemnation of any attack against civilians while acknowledging the right to self-defence, which must always be guided by the principles of proportionality, precaution and distinction.

We emphasize the need for an urgent compromise between Israel and Hamas, which would allow a long-term ceasefire. We highlight the important efforts being made to that end by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and Egypt, among other countries with influence in the region. We believe that an agreement of that type should serve to improve the tragic humanitarian conditions in Gaza, bearing in mind that the intensification of violence is often accompanied by retaliatory measures that create chaos on the civilian population.

We also consider it necessary for the Palestinian Authority to resume effective control over Gaza, with a view to improving the humanitarian situation and laying the foundations for a resumption of Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. We reiterate the need to guarantee the performance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing essential services. To that end, we welcome the significant contributions recently made by countries in the region and by the European Union, which have made it possible to alleviate the shortfall in UNRWA's resources for the current year.

The prospects for a political solution are becoming increasingly unclear. It should be a cause for alarm that recent opinion polls allude to a significant reduction in the support of Israeli and Palestinian citizens for the two-State solution. Persistent and harmful practices such as settlements, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 undermine precisely the two-State solution and contravene resolution 2334 (2016). Those illegal practices must cease.

We also consider it imperative to reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all their forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity must be appreciated as a value, and never as a threat. We face an extremely turbulent and uncertain situation, which requires more than ever that leaders on both sides show concrete restraint, commitment to peace and respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Those efforts must necessarily be supported by the international community. The Security Council, in line with its sensitive responsibility to ensure international peace and security, cannot and must not remain silent in the face of the gravity of developments on the ground. Peru supports all efforts to reverse the cycle of destruction, address the underlying causes of this prolonged and bloody conflict and achieve the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East,

including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, whose briefing challenged us once again on the need to continue collective efforts to restore peace and stability in a region affected by numerous crises, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest and one of the most worrisome.

The breakdown of the relative calm, followed by the resumption of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, is a source of concern for the Security Council. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its consistent position in favour of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through dialogue. Therefore, we call on all parties to exercise restraint and urge them to refrain from unilateral actions that would irreparably harm the chances of a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

My country values the security of the State of Israel, just as we recognize the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. That deep conviction is reflected in my country's continued support for the two-State solution — Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular clashes and an increasingly unfavourable socioeconomic situation characterized by one of the world's highest youth unemployment rates, increasingly difficult access to health care, continuing water shortages and very limited electricity supply. In addition, there is irregularity in the payment of civil servants' salaries.

My country would like to express its gratitude to all State and non-State actors that, despite the obvious difficulties on the ground, are making every effort to ensure that the suffering population can maintain hope for a better tomorrow. In view of the gravity of the situation, Côte d'Ivoire calls for the mobilization of the international community to provide substantial humanitarian assistance to people in need.

In that regard, we welcome Qatar's provision of resources to supply 200 megawatts of electricity and financial assistance for the payment of salaries of Palestinian civil servants. We would also like to thank Kuwait for its multifaceted assistance to the desperate Gaza population, which is on the brink of a troubling situation. Côte d'Ivoire is also concerned about the funding difficulties facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and urges the United Nations and international partners to address them in order to ensure continued assistance to Palestinian refugees.

It is undeniable that the critical humanitarian situation and the risks of a major regional confrontation will be averted only if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict finds a lasting and mutually acceptable solution. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on the Israeli and Palestinian sides to return unconditionally to the negotiating table as part of the good offices and missions led by the United Nations.

Against that backdrop, my country supports Egypt's commendable efforts to promote reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, which will ensure the Palestinian Authority's meaningful involvement in peace negotiations and better handling of humanitarian issues in Gaza. We also welcome the ceasefire following the recent mediation by Egypt and the United Nations. We hope that this cessation of hostilities will be sustained in order to create the conditions for a resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire affirms its support to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, in his untiring efforts to promote a dialogue aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a key to the restoration of lasting peace and stability in the entire Middle East.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive and valuable briefing on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question.

We have been closely following the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, and we are deeply concerned about these developments, which undermine the hopes for peace. We strongly support the efforts of the Secretary-General, the Special Coordinator, the Government of Egypt and others to restore calm. We welcome all attempts to reduce tension and prevent further escalation.

The deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in Gaza is extremely worrying. Essential services such as water, fuel, electricity and access to health care must be restored as soon as

possible, and we must prioritize enabling the movement of people, goods and services. It is also equally important to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation and support Egypt's efforts to bring the Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority's control, as laid down in the 1994 Cairo Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. It is vital that all sides exercise maximum restraint and work to de-escalate the tension to avoid continuing to endanger the lives of innocent civilians. Any escalation merely undermines efforts to improve the lives of Palestinians and support the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.

It is self-evident that unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying problems are resolved peacefully, this latest tragedy will only be repeated and the situation will once again move rapidly towards a point of no return. It is critical that we find ways and means to limit the damage and to work, however difficult it may be, to continue the peace process and save the two-State formula. That is the long-held position of the United Nations and the international community. There is no doubt that it is still the best and the only realistic option for the future. Of course, the same underlying problems and obstacles to peace persist. There has been little or no sign of movement, and the present situation is hardly conducive to sustainable peace or security for either party. It is clear that genuine efforts to remove the obstacles are a prerequisite for any meaningful progress towards realizing a two-State solution. In other words, it is essential to ensure that direct negotiations between the parties are resumed without preconditions or delays. The international community as a whole, and the Security Council in particular, must put their full weight behind this and do it as quickly as possible. The sooner that happens, the better it will be for both Israelis and Palestinians, and indeed the entire region.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. That is the way the agenda item we developed together is written, so let us abide by it.

We deplore the fact that the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territories, the epicentre of the potential for conflict in the Middle East, is untenable, consisting as it does of an endless series of crises. The result is that it blocks any movement towards achieving a comprehensive, sustainable Arab-Israeli settlement and resolution of the Palestinian question on internationally recognized foundations, which include the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, and the two-State formula, which provides for the creation through negotiations of a State of Palestine coexisting in peace and security with Israel.

Against a backdrop — repudiated by the entire international community — of aggressive revision of agreements previously arrived at, including in the Security Council, any prospects for a resumption of the negotiation process are receding. The gulf of misunderstanding and mistrust between Palestinians and Israelis is widening. What is now front and centre is not the call for peace and peaceful initiatives but violence, unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric. In the Gaza Strip, where only recently much effort had succeeded in creating a relative lull, the tensions have not subsided. A willingness to show restraint must be maintained. Actions resulting in civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian facilities in the Gaza Strip and in Israel should be firmly condemned.

Considering the current worsening of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, we have been urging the parties to immediately end hostilities. We appreciate and support the mediation efforts of Egypt and the United Nations to restore the ceasefire. We hope it will be sustainable and long-term, that it will enable the international community to mobilize efforts to improve the dismal humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and focus on advancing the political process. Of course, we particularly emphasize that any assistance to the Gaza Strip should be carried out in close coordination with the legitimate Palestinian authorities, led by President Abbas, and should conform to the goal of restoring Palestinian unity.

We urgently need to mobilize our collective diplomacy in order to prevent the failure of the efforts that all of us in the international community have made together to establish the conditions for implementing the only viable solution there is, a two-State solution based on direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. It is through the direct dialogue format that we can work to find answers to all final status issues, including those regarding Jerusalem, refugees, borders and all the security issues that are crucial to the region. These sensitive issues cannot just be taken off the negotiating table before the parties can discuss them.

If they are not settled, they will still surface as painful shocks for everyone.

The policy of creating faits accomplis on the ground in an attempt to anticipate the outcome of a bilateral discussion of these issues is not acceptable. We consider the expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian property and the eviction of Palestinian families illegal, in contravention of international law and detrimental to a two-State solution. The holding of municipal elections in the occupied Syrian Golan by Israeli authorities is equally unacceptable and illegitimate. This dangerous step, which violates more than one Council resolution, could have far-reaching negative consequences for a Middle East settlement as a whole.

Russia's position remains consistent. We maintain and develop relations with all the States in the region based on a positive agenda. We support a resumption of active efforts by the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which is still the only mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions. Russia's proposal for hosting a summit between the leaders of Palestine and Israel is still on the table, and we want to point out that the Palestinian leader has repeatedly confirmed his agreement with that initiative. We will continue our financial and political assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA's work is vital, as it has an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East. It must be able to survive and function fully.

In conclusion, we want to once again urge our colleagues in the Council to refrain from making threats and unfounded accusations, and instead do the essential work of strengthening the overall atmosphere of trust in the Security Council, the Near and Middle East and North Africa and to abandon policies of confrontation once and for all. Israelis, Palestinians, Saudis and Iranians all deserve to live in prosperity and security, but if that goal is to be achieved, the regional security architecture must be comprehensive and indivisible, and diplomacy and dialogue channels must be brought to bear. We believe that Russia's security concept for the Persian Gulf constitutes a good basis for launching efforts in that direction. History has shown us that we can succeed in the Middle East only when we work together according to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Mr. Clay (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the recent violence in Gaza and Israel, including the civilian casualties. We must do everything we can to avoid another devastating war, which would compound the already awful humanitarian and security conditions that ordinary Gazans face and further threaten the security of Israeli border communities. We urge all parties to show restraint, and we welcome the return to calm of the past few days. We strongly support the mediation efforts of the international community led by Egypt and the United Nations, and urge for talks to continue aimed at achieving enduring peace in Gaza under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

We strongly condemn the firing of projectiles from Gaza towards Israel. Our Ambassador to Israel visited communities affected by the rocket fire on Tuesday. Hamas and other factions must end such attacks immediately. The recent deaths on both sides of the conflict are alarming. In order to protect civilians, it is crucial to ensure that a ceasefire is agreed on and maintained as part of a political process that sees the Palestinian Authority return to Gaza and the restrictions on the Gazan people and economy lifted. As Mr. Mladenov made clear today, no effort must be spared to reverse the spiral of violence. The cycle of conflict in Gaza has gone on for too long and the civilian populations in Gaza and Israel have suffered the consequences. We call on Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refrain from any action that could lead to further deterioration.

We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and have been holding frequent discussions with the Government of Israel about the importance of easing its restrictions on Gaza. The United Kingdom welcomes the recent efforts to improve the humanitarian situation, especially the increase in the supply of electricity from between four to six hours to 12 hours a day, and the Palestinian Authority's continued payment of salaries and other costs. As others have done, we also welcome the recent contributions that have been made to close the funding gap for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and we reiterate the United Kingdom's support for the Agency.

If the situation in Gaza is to improve, it requires political resolve. The October 2017 reconciliation

agreement was a good start, but now all the Palestinian factions must work together to implement an agreement. We strongly support the efforts of Egypt, the Special Coordinator and the wider international community to achieve that. The United Kingdom will continue to urge the parties to prioritize progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. That is the only way to improve the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and guarantee Israel's long-term security.

In conclusion, the people of Israel and Gaza have the right to live without constant fear for their security, and both peoples have the right to live safely and in peace. Urgent steps must be taken now to address the underlying causes of the conflicts. It is in everyone's interest for peace and stability to prevail in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Now more than ever we need a political process that delivers a two-State solution.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his excellent briefing. We would also like to pay tribute to the major efforts that he and his team are carrying out in the region.

We are quickly approaching the end of 2018, a year in which we have had several occasions to address this important issue, which we believe is still of enormous importance to all of us, considering that it is a focus of the media, an issue of concern to the entire international community and a decisive factor in the stability of the region.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is extremely concerned about the incidents in recent weeks in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza involving hostile exchanges between the Israeli army and Hamas militants, which have led to the loss of human lives and caused many injuries and extensive material damage. In that regard, we call on the parties to refrain from unilateral actions and provocations and emphasize that any incitement to violence must be condemned.

Since it began, this conflict has caused enormous damage to the parties, many measures have been taken to prevent it and find a solution, and massive amounts of money have been spent. But the reality is that the results achieved so far have shown us that while much has been done, it has not been enough to find a solution to the sad coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians' lives are becoming increasingly miserable, unstable and insecure, while for its part Israel cannot easily ensure its people's security, owing to the border activity between Palestine and its settlers — and all those factors and more have created an atmosphere of detachment and insecurity in the countries of the region.

Despite the Council's efforts over the seven decades it has spent considering this issue, the pain and sorrow of the conflicting parties have continued to grow. In that regard, we regret that the moments in the history of the situation that gave hope to the whole world have been nothing but a waste of paper. However, we still believe that it is vital and urgent to continue coordinating our efforts aimed to find a diplomatic way to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table. We believe that ensuring that all Council members are united on the issue is crucial in that regard, considering the influence and strategic importance of some of its members in the world generally and the Middle East in particular.

For its part, Equatorial Guinea would like to reaffirm its position, based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid peace principles, the Quartet road map and other instruments, that the Palestinian claims are just and that Israel has the right to live in peace and security. We therefore reiterate our support for a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, based on negotiations between the parties that ensure the two States' safe and peaceful coexistence and harmony with the other States of the region.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our call concerning the importance of continuing to work for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, bearing in mind that the exchange of accusations of non-compliance with the commitments in the reconciliation agreement signed in October last year between Hamas and Fatah has called into question its consideration and implementation. However, we hope that the efforts initiated by Egypt and other international partners will achieve the desired results. Lastly, we are grateful for the statements that various countries have made in recent months in support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East urging other States to join in that gesture of solidarity.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I am honoured by the presence here today of Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden. I would like to

start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and welcome his strong engagement on the issue, including in the recent efforts to prevent another conflict in Gaza.

The vision of the international community remains unchanged. It is one that sees Israel and Palestine, side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States and home to three world religions, in a two-State solution that resolves all final status issues. Every month, however, we reflect on the continuing deterioration of the situation on the ground, which seriously hampers the hopes for a two-State solution. Whether it is the continued Israeli occupation and illegal settlement expansion; threats of demolitions and evictions of villages such as Khan Al-Ahmar in Area C; violence in and around Gaza, including the recent firing of rockets, as well as incitement, hatred and violence; or actions that shrink the space for civil society, the parties have a responsibility to reverse those negative trends.

Last week we witnessed another dangerous outbreak of violence in and around Gaza. We condemn the firing of rockets against Israel by Hamas and other militant groups, and regret the loss of life on both sides. While recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, we underline that the Israeli response must be proportionate. In the past seven months, approximately 200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and more than 24,000 injured. We all know that another full-fledged conflict would be an immense tragedy.

We commend Egypt for its mediation efforts. But while calm has been restored for now, that is only temporary relief. The situation for the people in Gaza is untenable. It is a humanitarian catastrophe affecting 2 million people without freedom to move to or from Gaza. If we do not address the situation there holistically, a new flare-up of violence will be just around the corner. As we have repeatedly stated, there is an urgent need for, first, concrete humanitarian interventions with a quick, direct and immediate impact on daily lives that can alleviate the suffering; secondly, the easing of restrictions and improvement of access and movement to and from Gaza, including for all donors, with the aim of ending Gaza's closure; and lastly, steps that can further Palestinian reconciliation and enable the Palestinian Authority's return to Gaza. We support the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve reconciliation, and we call on all Palestinian factions to engage genuinely to that end. Only reconciliation can lead to a united Palestinian leadership and a reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Council has a responsibility to actively contribute beyond these regular meetings, and Sweden has made concrete proposals to that effect.

We need to show the so-called post-Oslo generation that there is an alternative to conflict, violence and a constant deterioration on the ground, and the voices of young Israelis and Palestinians must be heard and listened to, in line with resolution 2419 (2018). Israel and Palestine have a responsibility to build peaceful and inclusive societies, particularly with the meaningful participation of women and young people. The shrinking space for civil society, along with the negative human rights developments, is a source of great concern. On the Palestinian side, laws are used to curtail freedom of expression. On the Israeli side, representatives of civil-society organizations are delegitimized, which limits them in their efforts to do their important work. We call on the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to support and respect members of civil society and allow them to operate and express their views freely.

We cannot let the viability of a two-State solution move out of reach. Action is urgently needed if we are to avoid the risk of ending up not only in perpetual occupation but in a one-State reality, which was the reason for the Council's adoption almost two years ago of resolution 2334 (2016). We look forward to the Secretary-General's latest report next month, with a view to having a more thorough examination of its implementation. We must do everything in our power to make sure that the hope of two States is kept alive and that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements, is realized.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): On behalf of the members of the Council, I welcome King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden to the Security Council.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

China has been closely following the current tensions in Gaza, and is deeply concerned and distressed about the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip and the resulting casualties.

The use of force, and of efforts to halt violence with violence, does not help to solve problems. China appreciates the mediation efforts of Egypt and the United Nations and calls on both sides of the conflict to meet halfway, end their military actions and work to effectively promote the easing of tensions. Based on the interests of preserving their peoples' safety and maintaining peace and stability in the region, all the parties should exercise restraint in order to avoid the escalation of tensions. China has consistently advocated for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli dispute through peaceful negotiations, and we oppose any violence that exacerbates tensions or targets civilians. The Security Council and the relevant parties must focus on the long term and strive to create the conditions necessary for promoting stability and resuming dialogue. The international community should ramp up its sense of urgency, fully implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions and protect Palestinian civilians in a joint effort to bring the Palestinian issue back to the negotiation track in order to reach a settlement. I would like to highlight the following points.

First, a two-State solution is fundamental to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community should step up its mediation efforts, while adhering to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. All the parties concerned should work to effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016), stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, cease the demolition of Palestinian houses and the destruction of Palestinian property, and take measures to prevent violence against civilians. Secondly, promoting a resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks is a shared goal of the work of the international community. The international community and the Security Council should embrace an elevated sense of urgency and responsibility by launching a new round of efforts to promote peace. All parties that have significant influence with regard to the Middle East issue should play a constructive role in exploring new mediation mechanisms and breaking the impasse facing Palestinian-Israeli peace talks sooner rather than later. Thirdly, the final status of Jerusalem is key to advancing the Middle East peace process. That issue is as complex as it is sensitive, and it concerns the future of a two-State solution, as well as regional peace and tranquillity.

All the parties should be cautious when dealing with related issues, refraining from imposing solutions lest they trigger new confrontations. They should uphold the principle of respect for diverse histories, maintaining justice and fairness, implementing international consensus and achieving peaceful coexistence and, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus, work to reach a negotiated solution that accommodates the interests of all.

I want to reiterate that China has always been committed to advancing the Middle East peace process, supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate national rights and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The international community should step up its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. China will continue to follow the four-point proposal of President Xi Jinping for promoting a political settlement of the Palestinian issue, and we stand ready to work with the relevant parties and the international community to play a positive and constructive role in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8406

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8406th meeting

Monday, 19 November 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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18-38650 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: It is good to be with the Council. Since my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8383), the Secretary-General has announced that Mr. Geir Pedersen of Norway — a good friend of mine and an excellent choice, if I may say so — will be the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, following my own announcement that I will be moving on in the near future. The precise date will be determined by the Secretary-General in the light of all of the relevant circumstances. I therefore anticipate that I will be briefing the Security Council once again in December.

The Secretary-General has asked me to complete one final task: to verify whether the Sochi final statement can be implemented or not, and either to convene — which I hope to do — or leave clarity on exactly why we have not convened a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led constitutional committee that is credible, balanced and inclusive, and that contributes, in the context of the Geneva process, to the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

That work is therefore — as far as I am concerned and I am sure the Council will agree with me — absolutely urgent. It is vital to make progress in the political process, particularly on the constitutional committee. It is also central to the Secretary-General's considerations on the upcoming sequence of events, and I am not the only one to emphasize the urgent need to advance that work. On 27 October, we saw a quadrilateral summit take place in Istanbul between the Presidents of the Republic of Turkey, the French Republic and the Russian Federation and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. I attended that meeting and briefed the four leaders.

The summit was important because it was composed of two groups of countries with influence, including some of the guarantors of the Astana group, who had also been convening the Sochi meetings in January, and the members of the so-called small group on Syria. I saw how much importance the four leaders and their teams gave to the issue of the constitutional committee in hours of tough negotiation, including at the highest level. The four leaders were able to find common ground. They took many of my own messages on board and they produced a final declaration that I saw as positive and helpful. Other Governments have also thereafter welcomed it. Let me highlight three aspects in particular.

First, the declaration commended the progress made in implementing the Idlib memorandum. We all know how concerned we were just over one month ago about the developments in Idlib. We therefore also assessed that there continues to be progress on the implementation of the memorandum. We acknowledge that there have been occasional setbacks, including reports of violations on the part of both sides. However, it is still holding and it is holding much better than we had ever dreamt, so we should be keeping our fingers crossed. But any civilian from either side of the front line would definitely say that the overall situation has improved from that of a few months ago. That should be preserved and built upon. We therefore echo the emphasis of the Istanbul summit final declaration on the lasting ceasefire in Idlib.

Secondly, the declaration called for creating the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Syria. The guarantors underscored that returnees needed security from armed conflict, political persecution and arbitrary arrests, as well as humanitarian infrastructure, including water, electricity and health and social services. Let me translate that for the Council, if I may. It is clear that we need to establish the basic conditions of a safe, calm and neutral environment that will help to realize the conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of millions of IDPs and refugees, which is, in any

case, a fundamental element of a political package to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

Thirdly and, frankly, perhaps most importantly, the declaration outlined very concrete steps towards that political package by calling for the establishment and early convening, considering the circumstances, of the constitutional committee in Geneva by the end of this year with a view to achieving constitutional reform, paving the way for free and fair elections under United Nations supervision and in compliance with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, who are eligible to participate.

Since Istanbul, I have been proactively in touch with relevant players. I have been, as Council members know, in various places, and in London I hosted a consultation, within the context of the Geneva process, with senior officials of the small group, comprising Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. I also had a bilateral meeting with the Geneva negotiations head of the Syrian High Negotiations Committee, Naser Al-Hariri, who briefed me on the Committee's in-depth discussions that they are having in Riyadh on the constitutional issues. In fact, he indicated that they are ready to move forward and participate in any meeting convened by the United Nations within that context.

I have been in contact with officials from Russia, Turkey, the United States and other countries. An Iranian delegation came to see me just a few hours ago here in my office in Geneva on that subject, after its members had themselves been in Damascus. Senior Russian, Iranian and United States officials have also been travelling the region recently. Presidents Erdoğan and Putin are meeting, as far as I understand, today and tomorrow in Istanbul.

Regarding the broader atmospherics, since this briefing is predominantly a political one, allow me to briefly refer to some bullet points.

First, we have noted some violations in Idlib, but, as we have said, they have been limited so far, as well as some infighting there. Secondly, there have been signs of activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in eastern Syria, with reports of many civilian deaths resulting from the fighting with ISIL. Thirdly, there have been reports of tensions between the Turkish armed forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces along the Turkey-Syria border. Fourthly, there are reports of detainees facing new death penalties in Syria. Fifthly, a breakthrough convoy to Rukban has been facilitated — and we are very pleased to see that type of cooperation — by the Russian Federation, the Government, the United States and Jordan. My own colleagues returned from the area expressing shock at the terrible human misery in that stretch of the desert, including reports of severe protection issues, such as sexual and gender-based violence and the recruitment of child soldiers in that camp. Recently, we received some good news of the liberation in the south of children and women, who had been held by ISIL for far too long.

Let me note, apart from what I have said and going back to the political context, the announcement that the three guarantors — the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey — will meet again in Astana at the senior level on 28 and 29 November. We believe that the meeting should be an opportunity for them to consolidate their efforts on the implementation of the Idlib memorandum of understanding. On the issue of detainees, abductees and missing people, we strongly urge them to make the kind of progress that we have so far not seen and which has been forecast in that context. Many thousands of families in Syria are asking for no less.

It is also clear that the meeting in Astana will take place against the backdrop of the efforts being made by the same three countries, in their own capacity as conveners of the Sochi meeting almost a year ago, to begin the implementation of their own final statement. It was in January that the Sochi declaration made clear that they, and all of us, wanted to establish a constitutional committee. I will be closely monitoring to see if the progress will be useful in informing the preparations for the Astana meeting in relation to the constitutional committee.

As members can see, there are many strands of work under way, and we will draw final conclusions only in December. By that time, the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America will also have met on the margins of the Group of 20 meeting in Buenos Aires, where, presumably, they will also be discussing Syria. Many other important consultations will have taken place by then as well.

As I told the Council from Beirut, the United Nations welcomes and indeed encourages constructive and moderate suggestions on the issue of constitutional committee as long as they maintain the same spirit of

credibility, balance and international legitimacy of the middle third list. Let me unpack what I mean by that. I mean that the middle third list must fulfil the Sochi declaration criteria of

> "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women, [and] adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components".

I mean that the middle third list cannot just be a vehicle for political representatives, particularly eminent political leaders, of the political side, whether the Government or the opposition side. Civil society — the Syrian people — deserves a voice in a process that will determine their future. The first and second lists include political representatives, so here we should include the other Syrians.

To be credible and productive, the constitutional committee should contain experts who are known not only for their own relevant technical prowess, but who are broadly acceptable and known for their own skills in bridge-building between the sides. I also mean that there must be a balance of political orientations, including space for people who do not identify with the Government or the opposition.

Finally, a key part of legitimacy, which is very important to me and, I know, to the Secretary-General, is for the committee to contain a minimum of 30 per cent of women. The Government and the opposition lists fell short of that standard. In fact, the Government was better than the opposition. We need the middle third list to make up for that. The United Nations-facilitated middle list, as it stands, is on the table and encompasses all those dimensions.

Of course, credibility, balance and international legitimacy also relate to the overall package, including voting, the mandate, the chairmanship and the role of the United Nations. For instance, for us, credible rules of procedure mean that they do not make it possible for any single party to dictate or to encourage paralysis.

Those are some of the criteria I had in mind when I constructed the elements that are currently on the table, and they will remain the litmus test for how I will be assessing any suggestion regarding a credible, balanced and legitimate constitutional committee. If that is not going to happen, we may have to conclude then that it may not be possible to form a constitutional committee that is credible and inclusive at this stage.

In such an unfortunate case, I would certainly be ready to explain to the Council why it had arisen. However, let me be clear that our aim is and remains for the United Nations to issue invitations at the latest by mid-December and to convene a first meeting of the constitutional committee before 31 December, which is the date indicated in the very constructive Istanbul declaration.

Respect for Syria's sovereignty has never been called into question. I would like to remind Ambassador Ja'afari, who is present in the Chamber and often talks about it, that the United Nations has never questioned Syria's sovereignty. Resolution 2254 (2015) is explicitly prefaced by a strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. It makes clear that the process must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led.

However, let us also remember that this is a constitutional discussion in the context of one of the most tragic, brutal, cruel and merciless armed conflicts of this century. The Syrian people therefore must be enabled independently and democratically to determine their own future. That is called sovereignty of the people. For that reason, in the same resolution, the Security Council gave the United Nations the mandate to convene a political process, which, must, inter alia, identify a process and schedule for drafting a new constitution. As I have repeatedly stated, the Sochi meeting itself appealed to the United Nations to convene the constitutional committee in Geneva and was accompanied by a firm understanding in that regard.

At my last briefing in December, it will be my duty to explain where we are in terms of the constitutional committee and to leave a clean and clear path to my successor in that regard. In other words, we are in the final days of the attempts to implement the constitutional committee in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement. The weeks to come will be of crucial importance in that regard. The United Nations remains ready for the establishment of the constitutional committee. It is prepared to do its part, and I personally will spare no effort towards that goal up until the final day of my tenure.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): We would like to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and for all the work that he has done on behalf of the Syrian people.

Today's meeting takes place in an atmosphere of uncertainty and urgency about the future of Syria. The violence on the ground has diminished for now. That de facto de-escalation provides an opportunity to move forward decisively with a political process to bring about a peaceful and permanent resolution of the conflict. At the same time, the longer we allow the Syrian regime to stall and equivocate and to do everything that it can to avoid coming to the table for constructive talks on a political settlement, the greater the danger of a return to the violence that has plagued Syria for nearly eight years will be.

The United States reiterates its firm position that the constitutional committee should be convened without delay — in December, before the end of the year, if not sooner. The United Nations and the Special Envoy must move towards that goal by issuing invitations to all 150 committee members without further delay.

The Special Envoy and the Security Council have been discussing the formation of that committee for almost a year. The United Nations has compiled the list of the committee members with input from the relevant parties. The list of civil society representatives was to be determined by Special Envoy De Mistura. He has been more than patient and flexible in accepting input from the Syrian regime and from others. Any further deliberation must be seen for what it is: an artificial delay and a transparent attempt to distract and delay progress towards a political solution in Syria. Neither the Syrian regime nor the Astana group, in particular Iran and Russia, can be allowed to veto the Special Envoy's decision on the membership of the constitutional committee.

A committee over which Al-Assad or Iran have veto power is not credible and does not represent the interests of the Syrian people. Let us recall how this began — not with terrorism or with military combat but with a Government violently repressing peaceful demonstrators. That Government must not now be given a veto over fixing the mess that it made.

The burden is on Russia to show that it wants its own diplomatic initiative to succeed. Russia must bring the Syrian regime to the table. If it truly wants a political solution, Russia must end the obstruction of that process. In the past, Moscow has proved that it has the ability to influence its client in Damascus. It must use that influence today to prevent the Syrian regime from continuing to delay the formation of the constitutional committee.

The convening of the constitutional committee is a first and critical step towards a political transition in Syria. However, the international community will not even begin to consider providing reconstruction support before a durable and irreversible political process is clearly on track. Providing assistance before that point does nothing to address the root cause of the Syrian conflict: the repression by Bashar Al-Assad and his regime of the Syrian people. Al-Assad cannot be rewarded for destroying his own country and overseeing the killing of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. The international community must hold Al-Assad accountable, and the Syrian people must have the opportunity to hold him accountable. All those who were displaced or forced to flee the regime's repression must have the opportunity to have a new constitution that will protect them, as well as deliver parliamentary and presidential elections in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Only then will Al-Assad's victims achieve a measure of justice and only then will all the people of Syria be able to look forward to a better future.

It is long overdue that we begin the difficult task of ending the conflict and providing for the safety and stability of Syria. The Syrian people must not be forced to wait any longer. We must urgently seize this fleeting window of opportunity to achieve a political transition and a lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing today and for his ongoing work to advance the political process. I reiterate the appreciation and gratitude of the State of Kuwait for all his endeavours over the past four years to carry out his difficult task.

The Sochi agreement reached in January on the formation of a constitutional committee was a beacon of hope for the Syrian political process. However, 11 months since the agreement was struck, no progress has been made and hope is giving way to disappointment, particularly among the Syrian people, who have long awaited a political settlement that would meet their aspirations and legitimate demands after years of killing, destruction and displacement, and that would

preserve the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

The State of Kuwait supports the final declaration issued at the summit between Turkey, Russia, France and Germany in Istanbul on 27 October, in particular with regard to launching the work of the constitutional committee by the end of this year. We encourage the Special Envoy to continue to engage with the relevant parties so as to establish a credible and balanced constitutional committee as soon as possible. The committee is a key milestone in the transitional political process and a basis for additional milestones, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), including the drafting of a new constitution and the convening of free and fair elections in Syria, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of all Syrians.

We reiterate that the Sochi agreement clarifies the role of the Special Envoy and the Geneva process in the final formation of the constitutional committee. We believe that the Special Envoy has the necessary mandate to establish such a committee.

We reaffirm that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. All Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted unanimously, must be respected and should not remain dead letters. We are at a critical juncture regarding the Syrian issue. We must all seize the window of opportunity afforded to us by the upcoming days as long as there is relative stability in Idlib as a result of the Russian-Turkish agreement. We hope that progress will be made in advancing the political process before the end of the year so that Syrians do not enter their eighth year of conflict with no real and tangible prospects for lasting and sustainable peace.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his very detailed and informative briefing. On my own behalf and on behalf of France, I would like to once again commend his work and reiterate our full support for his tireless efforts.

We have again reached a moment of truth in Syria. On 27 October in Istanbul, the Heads of State and Government of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey underlined their commitment to a lasting ceasefire in Syria. That truce offers a narrow window of opportunity that we must seize in order to generate real political momentum. At this key moment, all our efforts must now be focused on relaunching a comprehensive political solution to the Syrian crisis. The establishment of the constitutional committee by the end of December should be the first step, and we hope it will be a catalyst. In other words, the creation of the committee could and should be the turning point that we have long sought — the first step towards real political momentum. The establishment of the committee by the end of December, at the latest, is therefore our main priority today.

Of course, there are differences among us, but everyone around this table has called for the holding of the first meeting of the constitutional committee by the end of the year. France, Turkey, Russia and Germany expressed that idea clearly in a statement on 27 October in the communiqué adopted in Istanbul. On 27 September here in New York, the members of the small group on Syria also called for such a meeting. I know that Russia is also mobilized to implement the outcome of the Sochi Congress, adopted in January. We must now all give shape to that shared objective by honouring our commitments.

It is important to note that the establishment and functioning of the committee are not in dispute. The rules of composition were set forth in the Sochi communiqué within the framework set by resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has full authority to convene the constitutional committee immediately. The United Nations also has the power to appoint the list of committee members from civil society. There is no ambiguity in that regard. The Special Envoy therefore has our full support in moving forward independently and without external pressure. In that context, all the conditions are now in place for the Special Envoy to issue invitations to the 150 members of the committee as soon as possible, so that an initial meeting of the constitutional committee can be held in December, in line with the Istanbul summit declaration.

It is the responsibility of the United Nations to ensure that the final composition of the committee is *balanced, lest it lack all legitimacy. We will keep a* close watch. No one — neither the regime, the Astana guarantors nor the opposition — has veto rights over the composition of the third list. The argument put forward by Damascus about respect for its sovereignty should fool no one and cannot be used as a pretext to violate its obligations and commitments. Resolution 2254 (2015), which we adopted unanimously, has set a legitimate framework for action that we must all follow. The

commitment made in Sochi is part of that framework. All of us — including the authorities in Damascus — have an interest in abiding by the framework, as it is the only way to achieve lasting peace.

Let us make no mistake — if the process fails, it will be due to those who sought to derail the rules established by the international community and undermine the legitimacy of United Nations mediation. In that case — that is, if the committee were unable to meet — we would expect the Special Envoy to clearly and publicly attribute responsibilities.

Although its establishment is crucial, the constitutional committee is only a tool. After seven years of war, there is no trust between the parties and little trust among international actors. It is therefore necessary to agree on clear parameters that can be shared by all. Those parameters exist. They were reaffirmed in Istanbul and I will recall them here: first, a durable ceasefire; secondly, the protection of populations through free and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance throughout Syria, as well as the definitive destruction of the Syrian chemical arsenals; thirdly, a constitutional process and free and impartial elections, monitored by the United Nations, that ensure the participation of all Syrians in Syria and beyond its borders, including refugees and internally displaced persons; fourthly, the adoption of essential confidence-building measures, in particular on the fate of detainees; and fifthly, the establishment of political conditions for the voluntary and safe return of refugees and displaced persons, including protection against political persecution and arbitrary arrests.

Those parameters must guide the Council in the coming months and create a safe and neutral environment that will make a political solution credible. Together with the members of the small group on Syria, we will firmly support the Special Envoy and his successor to achieve a political solution based on those principles.

In conclusion, Syria must rebuild itself politically to regain stability. It will also have to rebuild itself as a society. That is also why we remain fully committed to pursuing the important fight against impunity, so that the Syrian people can one day enjoy justice and lasting peace once again. In that regard, we welcome the recent decisions of the national courts and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. In the case of France, we especially welcome the issuance of three arrest warrants by the French judicial system against Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Al-Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud — three senior officials of the Syrian repressive apparatus and accomplices in crimes against humanity in connection with the Caesar files, including the mass use of torture by the Syrian regime. We will never compromise on issues of impunity. Only under such conditions can Syria rebuild economically, because any other construction would be built on sand.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and his team for all the work they do on the ground.

It is good that we are discussing this issue because it gives us an opportunity to recall, as the French Ambassador has just done, exactly how many agreements have been reached by the Security Council, including but not limited to resolution 2254 (2015), on what exactly the political process needs to do. I will not repeat what Ambassador Delattre said, but I do want to express the full support of the United Kingdom for everything said.

It is also good that we are discussing this because the people of Syria continue to need our help. They cannot rely on their own Government to protect them and, after all of the shenanigans over the constitutional committee and Sochi, they cannot rely on the partners of their own Government — namely, the Russian Federation and Iran — to protect them. I think that is a key point that the proponents of the Syrian authorities' sovereignty mantra would do well to bear in mind.

We fully support Special Envoy de Mistura. We want him to convene an inclusive, balanced and constitutional committee by the end of the year, and I join other colleagues in urging him to fully use the authority that has been granted to him through resolution 2254 (2015) in order to do so.

The key to moving forward is obviously rapid and palpable progress on the political track. Other speakers have referred to the commitment undertaken in the Istanbul communiqué of 27 October to launching the constitutional committee by the end of this year. Given that Foreign Minister Lavrov and President Putin contributed to the Istanbul communiqué, it is mystifying why it has not yet been implemented. The Special Envoy has been crystal clear that it is vital to have political progress. Resolution 2254 (2015), which

was adopted unanimously, is also clear that the Special Envoy has the authority to bring it about. We would welcome more detail as to why that vital piece of the political machinery has not yet been put in place.

It is right that the Special Envoy should consult, and we completely agree that if it is to be effectiveness, the constitutional committee must be credible and acceptable to all sides. That obviously requires the committee to be representative and inclusive, but not that any one side has a veto over its makeup. The Syrian authorities' argument that Syria's "sovereignty" defines what the international community can and cannot do in the Syrian crisis is a red herring and a distraction.

Under Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations, Members of the United Nations agree to confer on the Security Council the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and they further agree that the Council acts on their behalf. That is true whether the resolution falls under Chapters VIII, VII or VI, or where there is no specification. They agree that the Security Council acts on their behalf. That is what the Special Envoy is doing, and he deserves the explicit and concrete support of everybody around this table. I repeat that I would really welcome an explanation today on why further progress has not been possible. It is absolutely vital that we get this political process launched before the end of the year.

I will end by making a statement about the political process that, although general, holds deeply true. Without an irreversible and durable political process, there will be no reconstruction, refugee return at scale or rehabilitation for Syria. We have all been shown a way forward and I would welcome everybody around this table to today rallying to the Special Envoy and getting the constitutional committee set up well before the end of the year, so that this crisis can eventually begin a long and slow path towards resolution.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing on the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic, and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his excellent briefing, updating us on the status of the political process in that country.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the signing on 17 September in Sochi, under the auspices of the Russian Federation and Turkey, of an agreement providing for a demilitarized zone that has generally calmed the fighting, particularly in Idlib governorate. My country therefore urges the parties involved in the Syrian crisis to comply strictly with the memorandum of understanding and to refrain from any action likely to lead to a resumption of hostilities, which would further aggravate an already worrisome humanitarian situation.

My delegation believes that the memorandum will provide a new impetus to the process of political settlement of the Syrian crisis. In that regard, my country welcomes the holding in Istanbul, on 27 October, of a quadripartite summit involving France, Germany, Russia and Turkey, which stressed, inter alia, the importance of a lasting ceasefire through the full implementation by all parties concerned of the measures contained in the agreement on the demilitarized zone.

Côte d'Ivoire also supports the call issued at the summit for the effective establishment of the constitutional committee and a start to the drafting of a new constitution by the end of 2018, in accordance with the relevant provisions of Council resolution 2254 (2015). It also calls on the Syrian parties to define as soon as possible the regulatory framework for the organization of free and transparent elections, which will ensure the restoration of lasting peace in Syria.

In conclusion, my country reiterates its call for a political settlement to the conflict and urges the Syrian parties to resume negotiations. Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support for Special Envoy De Mistura, warmly congratulates his successor, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and urge all stakeholders to support them in their quest for a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. On this occasion, we reiterate our gratitude to him and his team for their important and tireless work, which is consistently constructive and thoughtful, to find a solution to the conflict in Syria and protect civilians.

Peru is closely following developments following the positive agreement reached between Turkey and the Russian Federation in September on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib. While we welcome the decrease in violence following this agreement, we cannot fail to underline the extremely fragile nature of the current Syrian situation, taking into account the diversity of actors present in the area and their opposing positions.

We believe that we are at a critical moment in which it is essential to act swiftly in the political sphere and to achieve commitments and concrete progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In the immediate term, that will require the constructive participation of the Syrian Government and opposition groups in the establishment of a constitutional committee, in accordance with the Sochi declaration. The drafting of a new constitution is necessary to lay the political and institutional foundations for sustainable peace in Syria.

We therefore welcome the commitment made in the Istanbul communiqué of 27 October to convening the constitutional committee by the end of this year. We encourage the parties to maintain a constructive spirit in the Special Envoy's forthcoming meetings with the Syrian Government and the countries of the Astana group, with a view to finding points of convergence on the specific issue of the composition of the committee's third list.

Peru reaffirms its commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Without prejudice to that, we stress that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, every Government must exercise its sovereignty in a manner consistent with the legitimate efforts of the international community to maintain international peace and security, in particular when the responsibility to protect millions of people in grave situations of vulnerability is at stake.

To that end, we emphasize the importance of all parties engaging constructively in the negotiations, demonstrating their commitment to the future and unity of the country, and fostering the confidence required to advance a process of national reconciliation and build sustainable peace in Syria. In that regard, efforts should seek primarily to avoid the further fragmentation of the country and to achieve its long-term stability, and not be motivated by the ulterior strategic and geopolitical considerations that have broadly intensified the conflict in Syria.

We consider it essential, within the framework of those efforts, to promote the adoption of confidence-building measures that would contribute to a more favourable environment for Syrian reconciliation. In particular, we expect substantive developments in the identification of missing persons, the surrender of mortal remains, and the release of detainees and missing persons. It is also necessary to address the serious humanitarian situation of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, and to guarantee the availability of financial resources and, above all, the political will to allow them a safe and dignified return under internationally accepted parameters. In conclusion, I reiterate the importance of establishing a representative constitutional committee before the end of the year and continuing to provide all the necessary support to the efforts being taken by the Special Envoy to achieve that end.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. At the outset, on behalf of Kazakhstan, I would like to express our most sincere gratitude for his efforts and those of his team in their commitment to peace in Syria. Most of all, we express our recognition for the Special Envoy's outstanding engagement, as demonstrated in the intensive consultations to make it possible to convene a constitutional committee that is credible, balanced, United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led.

We believe that United Nations mediation towards the resolution of the Syrian crisis is very crucial and needed. As the Astana format remains relevant, we would be honoured to see both the outgoing and incoming Special Envoys of the Secretary-General at the meeting on the settlement of the Syrian crisis to be held in Astana on 28 and 29 November. Many critical issues need immediate attention. Therefore, we must proactively continue to support the goals of the Astana and Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes.

At present, the contours of a peaceful life in Syria are becoming increasingly clear. We therefore consider it very important to continue to work on the establishment of the constitutional committee. That will allow for the drafting of a new basic legal for Syria. In our opinion, the Istanbul summit, which included the participation of the Heads of France, Germany, Turkey and Russia, outlined the prospects for creating the constitutional committee by the end of 2018. The first summit on Syria to bring together the representatives of the Astana process and the small group demonstrated that we may be close to finding a solution to the crisis, with new approaches to both political and humanitarian issues. In that regard, we hope that outcomes will be reached at the summit, including those relating to the establishment of the Syrian constitutional committee. Kazakhstan underlines the need for such a committee

as a starting point in the revitalization of the process of political settlement in Syria, where it would work in compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and United Nations resolutions.

Kazakhstan supports all initiatives aimed at resolving the violent conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible. We consider the protection of Syrian people, civilians and property as a high priority. Only a political-diplomatic approach in the spirit of the Charter and Security Council documents on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace can bring appropriate results. Kazakhstan will work with the international community to support all parties to the inter-Syrian negotiation process, aimed at strengthening the path to a peaceful solution to the crisis and the mitigation of the humanitarian situation. Moreover, given that the situation in Syria is gradually stabilizing, we hope that humanitarian assistance will reach the population in need through direct routes as soon as possible.

We welcome the positive changes in Idlib after the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone, in particular with the restoration of transport and communications. We believe that the Sochi agreements should be promptly implemented in full compliance with the norms and principles of international humanitarian law. The agreements will consolidate the progress achieved and provide an opportunity to begin much-needed political negotiations. At the same time, we condemn the provocative actions of terrorist organizations. We concur unanimously that the international community should not allow terrorist groups to undermine the agreements.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Security Council has a special responsibility to end this tragic period in Syria. We urge the Council to unite around that common political goal, voice support for the Geneva and Astana processes and, most of all, for the Special Envoy to help the country achieve a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for the convening of this meeting and to once again thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura his comprehensive assessment of the latest political developments with regard to the conflict and, in particular, the contentious issue of the establishment of the constitutional committee. The Government of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its gratitude to the Special Envoy for his firm commitment and hard work over the past four years on this situation.

As some delegations before me have stressed, we are at a critical juncture. It is critical because two months ago we hailed the agreement between Russia and Turkey as a diplomatic success that could enable a ceasefire in the province of Idlib and subsequently pave the way for a possible definitive solution to the conflict. The recent quadripartite summit in Istanbul and the meeting of the small group in London even allowed for an opportunity to not only endorse the ceasefire agreed on by Ankara and Moscow, but above all to insist on the need for the establishment of the constitutional committee, in accordance with the Sochi declaration and resolution 2254 (2015).

Let us not deceive ourselves. Terrorists will continue to take advantage of our discord. The existing difficulties surrounding the establishment of the constitutional committee do not benefit those that, like Equatorial Guinea, want to find a definitive solution to the conflict; rather, they primarily benefit the illegal armed groups — the terrorists who in that situation may see an additional opportunity to not lay down their arms and instead continue to perpetrate acts of violence. In that context, we stress that it is necessary to make significant progress. In order to establish a committee that is representative, inclusive and credible, all of the parties concerned must fulfil their obligations. Furthermore, all parties have reiterated in various contexts that the political process in Syria should continue to be led by the United Nations. Therefore, we believe that the United Nations should continue its facilitator role, working with unquestionable transparency with regard to building a sound structure for the committee.

We reiterate that, in order to ensure the successful work of the constitutional committee, its participants must be willing to renounce partisan interests. As in any successful negotiations, the parties must have the ability to yield, even on certain issues, if necessary. On the other hand, the facilitator role of the United Nations is in no way a substitute for the will or sovereignty of the Syrian people. If we succeed in launching the work of the committee, it is essential that no external force interfere or attempt, by whatever means, to influence its decisions, which must be fully sovereign. Along those lines, my Government hopes that the forthcoming international consultations on Syria in Astana, scheduled at the end of the month, will provide

an opportunity to reaffirm the need to achieve a lasting solution for Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and, most important, initiate a discussion on the launch of the work of the constitutional committee.

In conclusion, Equatorial Guinea is a peace-loving country that has historically enjoyed substantial peace and stability, and that has been made possible by the policies undertaken by the Government led by His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. We want every country to have what we have. Equatorial Guinea does not have any economic or strategic interest in Syria. Our only interest is in ending once and for all the suffering of millions of innocent people. The conflict is entering its eighth year. Over those eight years, massive economic and human resources have been mobilized that unfortunately have not allowed for an end to the violence. The reconstruction of the country will be very costly. We must always bear this in mind — the longer we prolong the conflict, the heavier the moral and financial burden will be for the Syrian people.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): Let me first thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his clear and comprehensive briefing. We very much appreciate Mr. De Mistura's unwavering commitment in the remainder of his term in office. I would like to focus on the following three points today: the urgent need to convene the constitutional committee, the continuing need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib and northern Syria and the future outlook.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the Istanbul summit communiqué of 27 October. The constitutional committee should convene as soon as possible, before the end of the year, and move ahead with the establishment of a new constitution. The invitations to the 150 committee members should be sent out as soon as possible. It is the prerogative of the United Nations to do so. Staffan de Mistura has been given a clear mandate by the Security Council, through resolution 2254 (2015), and through the Sochi outcome document. Now is the time to deliver. All parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, should cooperate constructively with the United Nations to prevent further delays in the political process. Those with leverage bear a specific responsibility in that regard. The committee is not a goal in and of itself. It is, and should remain, part of the broader United Nations-led political process, based on resolution 2254 (2015). One can speak of a credible political process only when the constitutional committee itself is credible. The convening role of the United Nations ensures this. No one should be able to hold the convening of the constitutional committee hostage. The inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians are key. The committee itself, and any subcommittees that will be created, should at a minimum include 30 per cent women.

That brings me to my second point — our concern about the increased shelling in Idlib and the continued need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib and northern Syria. The increased shelling that we have seen in Idlib over the past couple of weeks is reason for concern. It is of key importance that the agreement on Idlib between the Russian Federation and Turkey hold, and that it is implemented by the parties through continued cooperation. The alternative to sustained de-escalation is a devastating humanitarian catastrophe. Let me also stress the importance of stability in north-east Syria and continued progress in the joint fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). Military actions in that area should stay sharply focused on addressing the threat of ISIS.

That brings me to my third and final point, with regard to the outlook for the future. Syria currently is not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Voluntary return can be facilitated only when the internationally agreed protection thresholds are in place. It is essential that security and property rights guarantees be established for refugees and internally displaced persons seeking to return. In that regard, we are deeply concerned about Law 10, which apparently has been reincarnated into Law 42. We support the United Nations in its call to suspend that law.

We need accountability for all the grave human rights violations and atrocity crimes in Syria and to bring those responsible to justice. The Conference of States Parties to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is currently under way in The Hague. It is crucial that we achieve attribution for chemical-weapons use as a step towards accountability. Let me stress once again in that regard our support to the Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. A referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court remains the best path forward to fight impunity.

In conclusion, we strongly disagree with the premature calls for reconstruction aid. We reiterate that the European Union will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing, and we reiterate our support for his continued diplomatic endeavours to facilitate a political solution to the Syrian conflict. He has devoted his full energy and decades of experience and knowledge to facilitate a peaceful end to the Syrian crisis. We are deeply grateful for his indefatigable efforts and sense of optimism while dealing with one of the most difficult diplomatic assignments.

Although there are still clashes in some areas, the relative calm in Syria is encouraging. Particularly, the implementation of the demilitarization agreement, reached between Russia and Turkey, has averted a possible humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib. The sustained and full implementation of the Idlib agreement is indeed vital, and we thank Russia and Turkey for their endeavours in that regard. We note the relentless efforts that the Special Envoy has continued to make in order to establish the constitutional committee. In addition, there have been international diplomatic initiatives, including the quadrilateral summit, held in Istanbul on 27 October, which called for establishing and early convening of the constitutional committee in Geneva by the end of the year. In that regard, we stress the importance of supporting the Special Envoy to form the committee as soon as possible, according to the Sochi final agreement and resolution 2254 (2015). That would be a significant step in revitalizing the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process under the auspices of the United Nations. We encourage all Syrian parties to engage constructively with the Special Envoy. All other Member States with influence should also support the efforts of the Special Envoy.

The Syrian people have endured an unspeakable tragedy over the past eight years. As there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict, the current situation should be seized as a window of opportunity to reinvigorate a comprehensive political dialogue that could support the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Syrian people. The Council should also speak with one voice and support the work of the Special Envoy and his successor in facilitating progress on the political track to resolve the Syrian crisis. We look forward to hearing from the Special Envoy next month and to receiving his comprehensive assessment of the Syrian peace process and the way forward.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, whose work to date we acknowledge.

We believe that tensions in Syria have been reduced thanks to the efforts of the Astana guarantors, as well as other countries whose agreements, such as that between Russia and Turkey, have made it possible to reduce violence in Syria so as to allow relative peace to return among the civilian population. We are hopeful with regard to the outcome of the meeting with the three guarantors to be held at the end of this month. Moreover, we emphasize the tireless work of Mr. De Mistura with regard to such a sensitive issue, which is important not only for the Security Council but for the entire international community. At a time that we are thanking him for all the work done over the years, we reiterate our full support for the efforts that he has made and will make until the end of this year to foster a political solution to the situation. We highlight the efforts made to date, as well as the high-level diplomatic meetings held over recent weeks. We welcome the holding of the quadrilateral summit in Istanbul and its outcome document. We hope that such rapprochements will produce results in the coming months, with the establishment of a credible, balanced and representative constitutional committee that will allow for consolidating the relative peaceful situation in Syria, which necessarily entails working in accordance with the conclusions arrived at in the Sochi declaration. Accordingly, we call on the parties to join forces to make that happen.

We once again reiterate our call to resolve this conflict through an inclusive political process, including concerted dialogue, led by and for the Syrian people, leading to a peaceful and sustainable solution to the situation within the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations. We reject any attempt to foment fragmentation or sectarianism in the country, as well as the presence of foreign military forces in Syrian territory without the authorization of the Syrian Government. We therefore highlight the need for them to withdraw from Syria under international

law and, above all, in accordance with the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Lastly, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Geir Pedersen as the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to whom we convey our full support for his work.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General De Mistura for the update on the constitutional committee. We would like to say that we very much appreciate and support his tireless efforts to set up the committee before the end of the year. We are deeply disappointed with Syria's demonstrated lack of willingness to cooperate with the United Nations and the Special Envoy in the political process, which is in breach of the Sochi agreement. The establishment of a constitutional committee, which was agreed to in Sochi, is now long overdue. It is high time that those who initiated the committee, particularly Russia, intensified their efforts to ensure Syria's full cooperation with the United Nations. The Astana guarantors must now also deliver on their commitments in support of the United Nations-led process.

High-level meetings in the relevant formats have shown that there is now international momentum with regard to Syria that must be seized. As agreed in Istanbul, a constitutional committee should be in place before the end of the year, and invitations should be sent out by mid-December, as the Special Envoy mentioned. He has our full support in convening it within that deadline. We fully support his efforts to ensure that the committee is credible, balanced and representative of the Syrian people, as is also provided for in the Sochi final statement, and that it includes a minimum of 30 per cent women. His list of participants must now get the support it needs, particularly from the Astana guarantors. We reiterate that the Special Envoy has a mandate to establish a committee and decide on its composition. The Sochi final statement made it clear that the final selection of the committee would be made through the United Nations-led process.

We are encouraged that the agreement to cease hostilities in Idlib held, but there are now worrying signs of escalation. We welcome the call made at the Istanbul summit for the ceasefire to be upheld, and we reiterate our expectations of the guarantors in this regard. However, the best way to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Idlib is ultimately by enabling genuine progress towards a political solution and ensuring respect for international law. We also reiterate that Sweden, like the rest of the European Union, will not assist in Syria's reconstruction until a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process is firmly under way. The return of refugees must be safe, voluntary and dignified, and the conditions for that are clearly not in place at the moment.

The Special Envoys need the Council's active backing. At this critical moment, all the members of the Council should take a clear stand and deliver on their commitment to supporting the United Nations-led political process and the Special Envoy. We must step up our joint efforts to make sure that the constitutional committee will indeed convene before the end of the year. Only through a United Nations-led process can we achieve a sustainable political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, acceptable to all Syrians and the international community.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing and his long service in his position.

Possibly for the first time in the history of the Syrian crisis, today an overwhelming majority of the members of the Security Council have made the important admission that the situation in Syria is really continuing to stabilize. This trend began in October 2015 when at the request of the Syrian Government the Russian Federation began a counter-terrorist operation in Syria. Today we can say that the greater part of Syrian territory has been cleared of terrorists.

We are worried about the activities of terrorist groups in Idlib, which are violating the de-escalation agreements and putting them in jeopardy. A number of attempts by Al-Nusra militias and groups associated with them to infiltrate Aleppo have been suppressed. Civilians in the western part of the city have been killed by jihadist shelling. The Turks are making serious efforts under their existing obligations to separate the moderates from the terrorist groups. That would be greatly facilitated by having those who prepared, financed and sent those groups to Syria in the early stages of the conflict with the aim of ousting the legitimate Government — thereby crudely violating the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of non-interference in States' internal affairs — educate them on the situation. Believe me, that would be a much more meaningful contribution to our efforts to reach

a settlement than endless, unfounded questions and demands on Russia and other States about what to do and how to do it.

In parallel with progress on the military front, there has been also been progress on political cooperation. There is ongoing constructive dialogue between the Russian and United States specialists. A significant summit was held in Istanbul at which leaders from Russia, Turkey, France and Germany made major decisions, and work is currently under way to implement them. At the same time processes for organizing refugees' voluntary return and rebuilding the country are being established, but it would greatly help our efforts if our Western partners joined these processes in a constructive spirit and stopped violating Syrian sovereignty and illegally occupying its territory.

Another point I want to make is that we are once again calling on our partners to stop using phrases such as "the Syrian regime". No one has certified the use of such definitions or labels anywhere. What should be happening is that more attention should be paid to Syria's reports of indiscriminate coalition air strikes east of the Euphrates that have killed dozens of people and should be investigated. In that connection, we share the concerns of the United Nations about the consequences for civilians of the military operation is conducted in that area. We also want to remind the Council of the results of the coalition forces' bombardment of Raqqa, where mass graves have been found.

At the end of November, we plan to hold the next Astana format meeting with our partners in the process. We are trying to make progress on the political front with regard to implementing the Syrians' decision in Sochi to set up a constitutional committee. Needless to say, it was a decision taken by the Syrians themselves in response to the prolonged stagnation of the peace process, and it has given momentum to the United Nations-led intra-Syrian dialogue that Mr. De Mistura has been shepherding for the past few years under resolution 2254 (2015). As the leaders of the four States said in their joint statement in Istanbul on 27 October, we intend to start the work by the end of this year, circumstances permitting. As before, we believe that all the parameters for the committee's operations, including its structure, composition and rules of procedure, should be decided by the Syrians themselves. That is the only way to ensure that it is effective and fit for purpose. Any attempt to dictate how or what to do to the Syrians is a sure way to a dead end. And we suggest that we all get to work collectively instead of asking each other questions. That would help us to solve a lot of the problems quickly and really get the political process moving under the exclusive leadership of the Syrians themselves.

We hope that as he begins his duties in early December, Mr. Geir Pedersen, the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, who we know is an experienced and impartial diplomat, will base his efforts on the robust foundation established in the Geneva, Astana and Sochi forums.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive briefing.

The Syrian conflict has entered its eighth year of continuing widespread violence and persistent violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, by all parties. Now we are at a critical juncture. On the one hand, we strongly believe that the Idlib ceasefire agreement could be an opportunity to build on the de facto ceasefires in place. On the other, unfortunately, we are still seeing a growing escalation of violence in some parts of Syria, especially the north-west.

Keeping that in mind, it is necessary to emphasize that the political process has continued to fail to gain traction, including over the establishment of the constitutional committee. That is why we have already expressed on several occasions our strong support for maintaining the Idlib de-escalation zone. We urge the parties to the conflict to respect the agreement on the ceasefire. We strongly believe that a political solution is key. We share the assessment made by Mr. De Mistura that the alternative would be territorial gains and not sustainable peace.

We also call on the Astana guarantors to follow through on their commitment and protect civilians as a matter of priority. As there is no military solution to the conflict that could bring sustainable peace to Syrians, we should aim at reaching an intra-Syrian framework political agreement. It is also important to note that a cessation of hostilities may give the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva a chance to gain momentum, so that a political solution might be finally reached.

Let me also underline that a political solution must be brokered in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The

United Nations, and specifically Special Envoy De Mistura, have a special role in that process. That is why we express our full support for all the efforts of the Special Envoy to establish a constitutional committee as soon as possible.

In a broader context, we also welcome the Istanbul joint statement's commitment made on 27 October to launch the constitutional committee by the end of the year. It should be implemented now, as a priority, and further steps should swiftly follow to enable a negotiated political transition process. That requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict. A special role has to be played by the Syrian authorities, which should participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Poland will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict within the United Nations framework, is firmly under way.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

First, I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I express my appreciation to the Special Envoy for his unremitting efforts to promote a political solution to the Syrian question. Recently, there has been positive momentum in the political arena. The leaders of Russia, Turkey, Germany and France held the Istanbul meeting aimed at promoting the political process, while Special Envoy De Mistura has continued his efforts to establish the constitutional committee. The eleventh meeting of the Astana process will also be held soon. The memorandum on stabilizing the de-escalation zones in Idlib has generally been implemented, which is conducive to creating favourable conditions for a political settlement. However, challenges remain in Syria.

Political negotiations are the only way out to reach a political and durable solution in Syria. While maintaining the United Nations as the main channel of good offices, the international community should continue to promote an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). The focus should now be on the following three areas.

First, efforts must be stepped up to form a representative constitutional committee that is acceptable to all parties. A balanced approach is required to accommodate the legitimate concerns of the Syrian Government, so as to start an effective and sustained political process. The United Nations, in conjunction with leveraging the role of the Astana process, must continue to increase its good offices to help the parties in deepening their consultations.

Secondly, continued efforts are required to steer Syria towards sustained stability and improvement on the ground. The stakeholders that have influence over the parties must make sure that the demilitarized zones function effectively. The international community should work together to fight terrorists and prevent terrorist groups from staging a comeback. It is necessary to respect and maintain the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and create a favourable environment for the political process to take hold. The international community should support the return of the Syrian refugees and help with the reconstruction of the country with a view to creating favourable conditions for the return of refugees.

Thirdly, the Government and the opposition groups must act on the basis of their country's future and the fundamental interests of their people, solve their differences and take it step by step to reach a political settlement that reflects the conditions on the ground. While also accommodating the legitimate concerns of all parties, the international community should encourage the parties to make conciliatory gestures and enhance mutual trust. Council members must strengthen unity and speak with one voice.

China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community and will continue to play a positive and constructive role in helping to promote the political process, rebuild the country and improve the humanitarian situation, so that the country and the region can reclaim peace and stability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the presidency and the delegation of the Russian Federation, as well as all the delegations that used the official name of my country

in their statements. Roughly one month ago, the Chair of the General Assembly Third Committee asked all delegations to use the official names of countries when they make statements. Some tried to make an exception, but the Chair of the Third Committee interrupted them and compelled everyone to respect the official country names, in line with the rules and regulations and for maintaining the political discourse. That Committee Chair therefore succeeded in upholding respect for the way of addressing each other. I humbly ask the Security Council to follow the example of the Chair of the Third Committee.

The founding fathers of our Organization carefully drafted the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations because it represents the foundation of the provisions of the Charter itself. They began the Preamble with those words,

> "We the people of the United Nations determined ... to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security".

Unfortunately, those noble principles have been flouted over the past seven decades, given the practices of some States that have tried to impose their hegemony on our Organization and turn it into an instrument to achieve their political objectives by manipulating those principles in order to justify their military aggression and deprive peoples of their rights. That has happened in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and many other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, those States have tried to invest in terrorism in Syria, as we are witnessing today in my country.

Are the hopes of the founding fathers to live together in peace with one another consistent with the conduct of certain States, including some permanent members of the Security Council that support armed terrorist groups in my country, Syria? Are the hopes of the founding fathers to live as good neighbours consistent with actions of certain States in the region that have issued takfiri fatwas to the terrorist groups and provided them with funds, weapons and training camps? Are the hopes of the founding fathers to pool our strength to maintain international peace and security consistent with the launching of aggression after aggression against my country, Syria, by the United States, Britain and France under flimsy pretexts? Are those hopes consistent with the establishment of an illegal United States coalition as a means to carry out the most heinous crimes against Syrian civilians, the most recent of which were the air strikes on the villages of Al-Boubadran and Al-Sousa on 15 October, killing 23 martyrs, most of whom were women and children; and the latest attack on Baka'an and Al-Sha'afa villages in the rural area of Deir ez-Zor two days ago, leading to the deaths of 40 civilian martyrs? In only one week, 100 civilians have been killed by the United States coalition forces in the rural area of Deir ez-Zor.

Such practices by those States against our region and other regions of the world show that they do not respect the aspirations of the founding fathers or the principles of international law. For them, it is as if such principles were nothing but a kind of sorcery.

As one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, my country continues to believe in the role of the Organization — a role that respects the principles of the Charter and the provisions of international law; a role that respects the sovereignty of States and rejects blackmailing policies imposed by certain influential States; a role that is based on impartiality, honesty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of any Member State; a role of good offices and not one that seeks to dictate conditions, ultimatums, threats and guardianship.

The Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue held in Sochi represented an opportunity for the Syrian people to engage in dialogue without foreign interference. All sectors of Syrian society participated in the Congress. We therefore hold a positive view of its outcome, including the establishment of a committee to discuss the current constitution. We are eager to see the formation of such a committee as soon as possible. We were the first to present our list of the members supported by the Syrian State. No one, therefore, can question our support for that process or our commitment to the outcome of the Sochi Congress.

In that regard, my country reiterates the important role played by the Russian Federation and Iran as guarantors of the Astana process. We note in particular that the idea of establishing a committee to discuss the current constitution was the result of an agreement by the Syrians who participated in the Sochi Congress, as affirmed by the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative, Mr. Vladimir Safronkov, and supported by the two guarantor States of the Astana process. We

have always been part of the process, so no one can ignore our role or their role therein.

Concerning the role of the United Nations and the mandate of the Special Envoy, especially with regard to the third list, I would like to make our position quite clear. We wish the Special Envoy every success and we welcome his role as a facilitator of the committee's work. However, he cannot impose himself as a third party, in line with the mandate entrusted to him and with the Charter and principles of the United Nations in terms of impartiality, honesty and non-interference in domestic affairs, which are an integral part of the sovereignty of any State. The issue of forming the constitutional committee is based on certain key general principles that we believe to be indispensable to the establishment and functioning of the committee. In brief, those principles are as follows.

First, there must be a true commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and of its people. There is no place for terrorism or support for terrorism in Syria. Any constitutional process must not undermine that commitment pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, international law, and Security Council resolutions relevant to Syria.

Secondly, the political process must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led because the Syrian people have the exclusive right to decide the future of their country without external interference, given that the constitution and all related matters are an issue of sovereignty that must be decided by the Syrians themselves. Any concept that represents interference in Syria's domestic affairs is unacceptable.

Thirdly, no prior conditions or conclusions with regard to the work of the committee and its recommendations are acceptable. The constitutional committee is sovereign and takes its own decisions, which are not subject to any other State or party, such as the so-called small group on Syria, which decided a priori on the outcome of the constitutional committee with the aim of sabotaging any progress made on the political process so that the outcome would be in line with the interests of the members of that group.

Fourthly, it is unacceptable to impose any kind of arbitrary duration or timetable concerning the committee, because that would be counterproductive. Our steps must be thoroughly considered and discussed, since the constitution will define the fate of Syria and future generations. No pertinent issue in that regard should be addressed in haste. We wish to see progress achieved, but the foundations must be solid.

In conclusion, my country, Syria, has always been serious in its efforts to achieve a political solution through intra-Syrian dialogue without foreign interference. However, the fight against terrorism is a priority issue at all stages of the political process, as are the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes; the launch of the reconstruction and recovery process; and the liberation of the Syrian territories that remain in the hands of terrorists and all occupying and illegal foreign forces.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.